



Albany Report

The legislative session began in January and I want to provide information on a number of important pieces of legislation that have passed the Senate thus far:

Repeal of “Walking While Trans” Law:

I am extremely happy to report that this week we passed my colleague Brad Hoylman’s bill to repeal the “Walking While Trans” law’. [S.1351](#), repeals the crime of Loitering for the Purposes of Engaging in Prostitution. The existence of this law has led to discriminatory enforcement by targeting women from marginalized groups, that are at high risk for sex trafficking and other exploitation and abuse. This law has never been more than an excuse for police harassment of some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, especially cisgender and trans women, and people of color. I was proud to join Senator Hoylman and my colleagues in the Majority in voting to repeal this relic of the past, and making New York a fairer state for all.

Addressing Healthcare Disparities:

This week the Senate also passed legislation to close the racial disparities gap in healthcare, building on the conference’s continued work to protect the healthcare rights of all New Yorkers. Increasing healthcare access is not just about removing cost barriers; it also requires confronting the broader inequalities and fault lines that lead to disparities in outcomes for New Yorkers across the board. This package of bills takes important steps on the path toward understanding and addressing why we are failing to provide appropriate care to far too many of our neighbors.

The legislation passed by the Senate include:

- **Study of Ethnic Disparities in Infant Mortality:** [S.879](#) requires the Department of Health of the state of New York to conduct a study of the effects of racial and ethnic disparities on infant mortality and prepare and submit a report.
- **Study of Ethnic Disparities in Breastfeeding:** [S.1296](#) requires the Department of Health of the state of New York to conduct a review of the effects of racial and ethnic disparities on breastfeeding rates and prepare and submit a report.
- **Cultural Education for Medical Professionals:** [S.1352](#) will require healthcare professionals to complete Continuing Medical Education courses in cultural awareness and competence training.
- **Collaboration Programs to Address Healthcare Disparities:** [S.1374](#) will authorize programs to work with hospitals, home care agencies and physicians to target health disparities thus improving health outcomes for under-served persons and reducing health care costs within the State.
- **Interagency Taskforce on Health Literacy:** [S.1407](#) will establish an interagency task force on health literacy to develop recommendations to improve access to available health services, identify barriers that prevent residents from being able to access available health services, and identify and educate groups at risk for low health literacy.
- **Health Equity Assessment For Certificate of Need Applications:** [S.1451](#) will require a health equity assessment to be filed with an application for construction or change to a hospital or

health related service, allowing consideration on how the project will impact medically underserved groups.

- **Study of Asthma in Cities:** [S.646A](#) directs the New York State Department of Health to conduct a study on the incidences of asthma in cities having a population of more than ninety thousand.
- **Addiction Treatment Equity:** [S.679A](#) establishes the Council for Treatment Equity within the Office of Addiction Services and Supports to address substance use disorder treatment disparities among vulnerable populations across the state

Election Reform

Last month the Senate passed a number of bills to improve New York State's electoral system and to protect New Yorkers' health and our state's democratic process ahead of the 2021 elections despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The right to vote is the most fundamental right of any citizen in our democracy. Appallingly, elected officials around this country continue to try to make voting more difficult and disenfranchise people, especially low-income people and voters of color, citing bogus and thoroughly debunked lies about fraud. I am proud to be part of a Senate Majority that has already passed historic voting reforms and yet continues to take action to improve voting access for all New Yorkers. Among the reforms passed this year are:

- **Speeding Up the Absentee Ballot Counting Process:** [S.1027](#), amends various provisions of the Election Law in order to allow for expedited review and canvassing of absentee ballots without compromising the integrity of elections.
- **Preventing Disenfranchisement of Absentee Voters:** [S.253](#) prohibits voiding absentee ballots on technicalities where intent of voters is clear and the law has been substantially complied with, including where there are stray marks or the ballot is undated but is time stamped by the Board of Elections.
- **Permanently Authorizing Absentee Ballot Drop Boxes:** [S.492](#), authorizes the Board of Elections to establish absentee ballot drop-off locations or drop-boxes to provide voters with a convenient and secure option for delivering their absentee ballots.
- **Increasing Transparency and Information about Absentee Ballots through a Tracking System:** [S.1028](#) ensures that all voters in the state have access to absentee ballot tracking by requiring the New York State Board of Elections to create a statewide absentee ballot tracking system for absentee voters ensure that their vote is counted in the election while allowing counties and the New York City Board of Elections to also maintain their own absentee tracking systems.
- **Implementing Permanent Authorization for Applying for Absentee Ballots Online:** [S.632](#), permanently allows voters to apply for absentee ballots online and allows absentee ballots postmarked through Election Day by making permanent Chapter 91 of the Laws of 2020, which sunset on December 31, 2020. Under current Election Law, applications may only be made by mail or fax.
- **Creating Accountability for Timely Receipt of Absentee Ballots:** [S.516](#) establishes a mandatory timeframes for processing of absentee ballot applications and ballots by Boards of Elections based on when the application was received.
- **Enabling Earlier Applications for Absentee Ballots:** [S.631](#) permits Boards of Elections to receive absentee ballot applications earlier than thirty days before the applicable Election Day by making permanent Chapter 138 of the Laws of 2020, which sunset on December 31, 2020.
- **No-Excuse Absentee Voting Constitutional Amendment:** [S.360](#) amends the State Constitution to allow for any voter to vote by absentee without an excuse.
- **Ensuring Voters Timely Receipt of Absentee Ballots:** [S.264](#) sets deadline for absentee ballot applications sent by mail to 15 days before the election, up from 7 days, to better allow for voters timely receiving their absentee ballots.

- **Protect New Yorkers' Health by Expanding Access to Absentee Ballots:** [S.1632](#) sponsored by Senator Shelley Mayer, will allow voters to request an absentee ballot for upcoming village elections if they are concerned about contracting or spreading a disease that may cause illness to the voter or to other members of the public.
- **Reduce Petition Numbers to Help Protect Public Health:** [S.2733](#) will reduce the number of signatures for designating and nominating petitions to thirty percent of the number required by law.
- **Enable Remote Participation for Political Party Designations:** [S.1705A](#) will enable political parties to use video or telephone conferencing to conduct party designations and nominations for village, town, and political party elections.
- **Protect Nursing and Long-Term Care Facility Residents' Health while Guaranteeing Access to Absentee Ballots:** [S.1644](#) will ensure that absentee ballots can be delivered to New York nursing homes and long-term care facilities without Board of Elections inspectors having to physically enter the premises. This will help avoid accidental exposure to COVID-19 for residents of these facilities.

Relief for Small Businesses and Workers

Last month the Senate also passed legislation to support the small businesses and workers that have taken the brunt impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the bills passed are:

- **Small Business Eviction and Foreclosure Moratorium:** [S.471A](#) establishes the COVID-19 Emergency Protect Our Small Business Act to protect small businesses with COVID-19 related financial hardships from eviction and foreclosure until May 1.
- **Third-Party Restaurant Posting:** [S.1630A](#) prohibits any third party food delivery platform from listing, selling or advertising products of any food service establishment without a written agreement with them.
- **Restricting Third-Party Delivery Fees:** [S.1554B](#) creates a maximum limit for the total fee that can be charged to a food service establishment by a third-party food delivery service (such as Grubhub, Seamless, Postmates, Doordash, etc.)
- **Increased Outreach From DOL on the Shared Work Program:** [S.18A](#), creates a requirement for the Department of Labor to increase their efforts to provide information to employers about shared work program eligibility and have information available on the Department's website. The shared work program can help reduce layoffs and is fully funded by the federal CARES Act during the pandemic.
- **Freezing Employers Unemployment Insurance Premiums:** [S.1197](#) freezes New York State's unemployment insurance experience rating for one year for layoffs and closures that occurred due to COVID-19. This action will prevent significant increases in costs to employers who have experienced higher unemployment rates in 2020.
- **Partial Unemployment Insurance:** [S.1042A](#) establishes a system of partial-unemployment. This would shift the current calculation that any day of work leads to a 25% reduction in benefits, and instead would reduce benefits by an amount proportional with the amount earned. This legislation will help incentivize part-time work by reducing the disincentive that a day of work will lead to a disproportionate reduction of benefits.

In addition to this legislative action, I am currently co-chairing a series of hearings on Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget Proposal. You can access those hearings here: <https://www.nysenate.gov/new-york-state-budget>.

District Matters

Sign up for my email updates on Coronavirus (COVID-19) to obtain the most up to date vaccine information at www.lizkrueger.com.

View my COVID-19 Resource Guide online – look up unemployment, housing, food insecurity, health care, legal, and other resources that are available to help address these challenges during the pandemic: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/122aJffPGtMpzeY9O7N2SPBrpqui4iNk4KiafKnZukQ/edit?usp=sharing>.

In December, I hosted a Virtual Town Hall on COVID-19 and Your Mental Health. I was joined by Steven N. Moskowitz, MSW Director, Bureau of Emergency Preparedness and Response at the State Office Of Mental Health, Douglass Ruderman, Director, Project Hope at the State Office of Mental Health, and Lisa Dixon, MD, MPH, Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University, and Director of The Center for Practice Innovations (CPI) at the New York State Psychiatric Institute. Video of the event can be viewed here: <https://www.lizkrueger.com/covid-19-and-your-mental-health/>.

The event included information about Project Hope, New York's COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline. NY Project Hope helps New Yorkers understand their reaction and emotions during COVID-19. Through an emotional support helpline, educational materials, and trusted referrals, NY Project Hope helps people manage and cope with changes brought on by COVID-19.

Project Hope Crisis Counselors are available via helpline. Talking to them is free, confidential, and anonymous. Talk to someone who is trained, knowledgeable and never judges. Emotional Support Helpline: [1-844-863-9314](tel:1-844-863-9314)

My annual Roundtable Series for Boomers and Seniors began this month with a virtual conversation on Palliative Care and Hospice. This year's Roundtable series will bring together experts to offer concrete tools to assist with end of life planning, and provide a forum to ignite our imagination about what we value and how we want to live as we age.

Video of the January event can be viewed here: <https://www.lizkrueger.com/sen-kruegers-roundtable-for-boomers-and-seniors-session-i-palliative-care-and-hospice/>.

The February Roundtable for Boomers and Seniors will cover the topics of healthcare proxies and living wills. This event will take place virtually on Thursday, February 18th at 10am. Stay tuned for more information on how to RSVP.

I'm hosting a event regarding telehealth on Friday, March 5th from 2pm to 3:30pm. Join us to learn when to use telehealth and how to use it most effectively. We'll explore the technical logistics of using telehealth to obtain the care you need from home. Stay tuned for more information on how to RSVP.

Liz